

Writing is a way of communicating a *message* to a *reader* for a *purpose*. With this in mind, essay writing involves having a clear understanding of your message (a thesis), of your intended audience, and of the overall purpose of your paper. Though essays can take a variety of forms, such as expository, argumentative, narrative, or descriptive, there is a general structure to follow, which will help to organize your essay in a clear and effective way.

Essentially, an essay is comprised of three main sections: an introductory paragraph, a main body made up of coherent paragraphs, and a conclusion.

The Introductory Paragraph

The introductory paragraph informs the reader of the topic, content, and purpose of your essay without providing too much detail. It is intended to create interest in the reader's mind, as you move from general statements to increasingly specific ones leading up to your thesis statement. An effective introduction will usually include the following elements:

- A **general opening sentence** that introduces your topic
- **Context** that provides important background details relevant to your topic
- **The main issue** that you will be developing in your essay
- A **thesis statement** that informs the reader of your central argument or position¹
- **An explanation of the importance of your argument**
- A **mapping scheme** that outlines how you will proceed in the body of your essay.

The Main Body

This section of your essay is made up of a series of **paragraphs** that follow a logical progression, where you outline the discussion of your topic and develop your argument. Depending on the length of your essay, the paragraphs may be grouped into **subtopics**, which help to organize your ideas in a structured manner and help the reader follow your line of reasoning.

A paragraph, like an essay, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It starts with a **topic sentence** that announces the main idea that will be addressed, followed by the development of that idea which is usually supported by **evidence** (direct quotes or paraphrasing) derived from your research material or reference text. Whenever evidence is used, it is important that you take the time to interpret it and explain its relevance to the main idea of the paragraph or your thesis statement. It is not enough to simply insert a quote without stating its relevance to your argument or essay. A paragraph will then end with a closing sentence, often in the form of a **transition sentence** that leads into the next idea or point to be discussed.

The Conclusion

In the conclusion of an essay, the thesis statement is restated (though not word for word), along with the main supporting arguments that were developed in your paper. The closing paragraph is an opportunity to bring together the key points of your essay and does not involve introducing new information to your topic. An effective conclusion does,

¹ See the Writing Centre handout entitled 'The Thesis Statement.'

however, go beyond simply repeating what has been discussed in the essay. It invites the reader to reconsider the thesis statement in light of how it was developed throughout the essay and to reflect on its importance. A good way to conclude this paragraph is to situate your thesis in a larger context that is relevant and thought-provoking for the reader.

Henderson, Eric (2006). *Writing by Choice*. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press.
Troyka, L. Q. *et al.* (1996). *Workbooks for Writers*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Canada.

Sample Introductory Paragraph and Conclusion

In this essay Naiker explores a theme common to a short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and a poem “My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke. Most of the author’s commentary is devoted to the social construction of the feminine in late nineteenth-century and, in particular, on the authority the medical community exercised over women.

Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” and Roethke’s “My Papa’s Waltz”: An Exploration of Ambivalence

By Kiyuri Naiker²

Introduction

We often look at our world in terms of opposites or dualities. Only the bravest writers attempt to explore the grey areas of life where binaries converge and borders are not clearly defined. Some have persevered and created scenarios in which our traditional methods of perception fail us, forcing us to peer into this undefined area. Much can be uncovered about human nature in the instances. Two authors, in particular, have excelled in examining these interstices as they occur in domestic relationships: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Theodore Roethke. The works analyzed here investigate what lies between the poles of sanity and insanity, abuse and affection. The ambiguous situations they have created draw our attention to societal concerns and ultimately urge us to question how we interpret the world around us.

Conclusion

Both the works discussed above provide complex and subtle social commentaries. Gilman and Roethke have explored everyday domestic life that exists between the dualities around which we tend to cluster. Their force lies in what they have left unsaid, leaving room for interpretation and, through it, self-examination. By leading us into areas we would normally never venture, they raise issues in feminism and domestic violence that are still pertinent today. As these authors’ works suggest, relationships are seldom simple or polar.

² *Writing by Choice* by Eric Henderson, 2006, p. 273-277, Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press.